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A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY IN THE KIMBERLEY

Reflections on a Catholic Identity

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The Lonergan Centre, Sydney
THE ENCOUNTER OF FAITH AND CULTURES

The Mission of a Catholic University in the Kimberley

Your culture, which shows the lasting genius and dignity of your race, must not be allowed to disappear. ... you and the values you represent are precious. We deeply respect your dignity and reiterate our deep affection for you.
- John Paul II, Alice Springs Address

An Educational Culture that Affirms the Value of Aboriginal Culture

How should a Catholic University approach culture in the Kimberley? At a basic level, Pope John Paul II (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n6) encourages a favourable view of local cultures. He notes that people's lives are “given dignity by culture.” Unfortunately, in Australia, we have seen the catastrophic effects of people being alienated from their culture.

At the same time, however, Pope John Paul II claims (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n3) that, “There is only one culture: that of man, by man and for man.” Yet this statement should not be interpreted to mean that John Paul II is committing the Church to a monoculture, with its followers expected to follow a dominant Euro-centred culture of the Church. Instead, he means that there is one universal human culture that serves universal human values, such as life,
freedom, family and human flourishing. There are also local cultures that, within specific contexts, foster those universal human values.

In the light of there being a universal human culture which is served by a plurality of local cultures, the question today is whether a Catholic university should either aim to replace local cultures with a more dominant culture, or to recover and renew the local cultures?

In the first place, Pope John Paul II (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n37) informs us that members of a Catholic university should relate themselves, as individuals and as a university community, to the learning, science, and culture of the region in which it is located. Behind John Paul II’s statement seems to be a viewpoint that a Catholic university exists not only to communicate the values of a dominant culture, but to engage in a mutual cultural dialogue in which both cultures are augmented and strengthened. Though this dialogue, John Paul II envisions not only better cross-cultural and cross-national understanding, but also a fruitful relationship in which different communities may discover in each other solutions to pressing concerns.

Thus, a Catholic university is not mandated to engage in a one-way cultural monologue, in which local people are initiated into a foreign culture. Instead, as part of the Church’s mission, a Catholic university is meant to foster cultural dialogue. This position reflects Pope John Paul II’s outlook expressed in Redemptoris Missio. He counsels missionaries from other cultures to, “immerse themselves in the cultural milieu of those to whom they are sent, moving beyond their own cultural limitations” (Redemptoris Missio, 53). This means that missionaries must learn the language and culture of the local people. Moreover, he rejects a position of aloofness or cultural superiority by proposing that missionaries can come to knowledge of a culture’s values through, “direct experience.” Without that sort of cultural immersion and sincere respect for local cultures, John Paul II sees it as impossible for missionaries to communicate Catholic faith and values “in a credible and fruitful way.”
Matthew C Ogilvie

John Paul II’s approach to mission thus stands in contrast to other models of mission that viewed other cultures in a paternalistic manner. Instead of paternalism or conflict with local cultures, John Paul II calls Catholics to communicate with (not at) local cultures by living in “solidarity with the people” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 53).

One should not, however, assume that John Paul II is abandoning the “Great Commission” (Matthew 28:16–20) to communicate Christian faith and values. Instead, if and when local communities embrace the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he anticipates that they should be able to express their Christian identity, “in original ways and forms that are consonant with their own cultural traditions.” To this end, a Catholic university has a vital mission because, as John Paul II notes, in developing their own cultural identities as Catholic, local communities should engage with each other and with the broader Church. Thus, as part of a worldwide network, a Catholic university in the Kimberley can play a vital role in linking up local communities with communities around the world that may have shared experiences and common wisdom (*Redemptoris Missio*, n53).

Returning to *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, and the specific mission of a Catholic university, John Paul II makes an important point that is easy to miss. He reminds readers (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, n43) that a university develops culture, but he also states that the university transmits “the local culture to each succeeding generation through its teaching, and assists cultural activities through its educational services.” Crucial here is the Pope’s use of the term, “local culture.” It is thus not the mission of a Catholic university to adapt to local cultures with a view to eventually steering people away from their own traditions towards a dominant culture. Instead, the Catholic university’s mission is to uphold, affirm and nurture local cultures. This is done, of course, with a view to ensuring that there is no conflict between a culture and Catholic faith and values (*Redemptoris Missio*, n54). Thus, the Catholic university exists as open to all human wisdom and learning and is ready to “dialogue with and learn from any culture” (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, n43). I think that is a radical statement and a reminder of the
mission of the University, which is not to strip Kimberley people of their culture by Westernising them, but instead its mission is to support Kimberley Aboriginal people in sustaining and transmitting their culture to future generations.

Having said that, such a view of inculturation fostered by a Catholic university cannot be uncritical, and it must address cultural or social practices that are contrary to basic human values. Part of the University’s mission is, through coming to a deeper knowledge of a culture, to determine both its positive and negative elements (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, n44). This point is important, though somewhat understated by John Paul II. Wherever the Church has encountered cultures, it has encountered both positive elements that the Church has adopted and negative elements that it has condemned. Thus, in its early days, the Church encountered the Roman culture and eventually adopted for itself the Romans’ law and structures of governance and even adopted its language (cf. Nemo 2006, 17-29). Yet the Church also called Roman culture out of its practices that were incompatible with Christian faith, such as infanticide and sexual immorality.

The theology behind this position is based on a rejection of what Bernard Lonergan (1994, 123-4, 302) calls, “classicism,” the view that the Christian faith can be tied to a single culture. John Paul II sees the Church as tied not to any one culture, but instead it is linked to human values that transcend all culture and inform all individual cultures (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, n44). However, whether it is Catholic mission in general, or the work of a Catholic university specifically, the Church’s work cannot be done in a cultural vacuum and needs cultural language, wisdom and values in order for people to work and engage others.

John Paul II thus commits Catholic universities to learning the cultures of the world and to realising that the Church embraces a plurality of cultural traditions within it (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, n45). In line with his anthropology and philosophy of culture, John Paul II identifies key elements of a culture, which include, “the meaning of the human person,” human liberty and dignity, personal
responsibility and orientation to the transcendent. One interesting criterion for culture that John Paul II mentions is, “the preeminent value of the family, the primary unit of every human culture.” In the Kimberley, this means that a Catholic university must be attentive to Aboriginal family ties that are richer and more intricate than those commonly experienced in Western society. At the same time, we see in John Paul II a criticism of certain cultures of the world, especially Western cultures, which see the unit of culture as being not the family, but the individual or the state.

Of particular importance to the Kimberley, John Paul II states that Catholic universities should engage critically and deeply the values and needs of a local culture in order to foster the development of individuals and communities. He is insistent, though (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, 45), that, “traditional cultures are to be defended in their identity, helping them to receive modern values without sacrificing their own heritage.” That point has been lost on Catholic theology and liturgical worship in the past, as will be seen below in more detail. However, for the present, it is sufficient to say that for too long, Catholicism has unnecessarily connected its faith with a dominant culture and has seen mission in terms of initiating people into both a religion and a foreign culture (Lonergan 1994, 123-4; Ogilvie 2001, 23-46).

What has just been written applies to all encounters of Catholic universities with culture. What, though, of Australian Aboriginal culture specifically? Pope John Paul II’s address to Aboriginal people at Alice Springs remains a seminal statement of the Church’s position towards Aboriginal people.

First, John Paul II acknowledges the dispossession and racism suffered by Aboriginal people, and their separation from their tribal cultures and land (Alice Springs Address, n7). Yet he also commends Aboriginal people for being able to survive and to endure, an endurance in which John Paul II sees courage and hope for the future.

The cultural history of Aboriginal people is also important for John Paul II. He acknowledges that even as Aboriginal people settled in Australia in relative
isolation from the rest of the world, they formed an ancient culture that endures. With specific reference to Aboriginal “Dreaming,” John Paul II makes the seemingly radical assertion that the “Dreaming,” resulted from the Spirit of God being with Aboriginal people (Alice Springs Address, n2). Such a statement may be provocative to certain Christians who see the mainstream of Scripture and Tradition as being the only sources of knowledge of God. Yet John Paul II explicitly affirmed that Aboriginal Dreaming was the work of God. As already indicated, this is an important theological point; recognising that Aboriginal spirituality is not something to be rejected and eliminated in the encounter of Catholicism with Aboriginal culture. Instead, Aboriginal spirituality is to be seen as compatible with Christian spirituality, coming as it does, by God being with and among the people. In fact, John Paul II sees Aboriginal culture as giving people dignity and making them open to the message of God revealed in Jesus Christ (Alice Spring Address, n4). Secondly, as John Paul II states, the Dreaming is still important for Aboriginal people who take on the Catholic religion. He refers to it as Aboriginal people’s, “only way of touching the mystery of God’s Spirit in you and in creation” and that, “You must keep your striving for God and hold on to it in your lives” (Alice Springs Address, n2).

In the spirit of cultural encounter seen above, John Paul II inverts the paternalistic expectation that Aboriginal people would need to learn from Western culture. He instead outlines lessons that Western culture can learn from Aboriginal culture. He notes (Alice Springs Address, n4) that Aboriginal people developed an integrated spirituality that brought them close to the land and all creation in it. That is, by seeing through their land, they saw the reality of the sacred and “proof of a power in life greater than yourselves.” By highlighting Aboriginal people’s relationship to the land, Christians should certainly be reminded of the importance of land for the people of the Bible. Certainly, for Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 12:1-9) the land of Israel was not just any plot of land, but specifically the Promised Land entrusted to Abraham and his descendants. Thus, Aboriginal spirituality and law serve as a
reminder of the Biblical tradition of people connected to a promised land; people who are not “owners” of the land but rather custodians of a land to which they belong. At the same time, Pope John Paul II calls to mind that Aboriginal people did not treat land as something to be exploited then abandoned. Rather, land needed to be cared for as the source of life (Alice Springs Address, n4). Thus, he points out a vital lesson that Aboriginal people can teach westerners, namely the value of seeing one’s land not as a commodity to be dominated, exploited and consumed, but rather to see land to which people have a relationship of custodianship, both for themselves and for future generations.

Pope John Paul II also acknowledged the wisdom and success of the Aboriginal legal system. While some aspects of the system caused him (a conservative Catholic) to comment on the strict nature of Aboriginal law, he observed that it was “closely adapted” to the country in which the people lived (Alice Springs Address, n4). The order that Aboriginal law brought was, in John Paul II’s opinion, a critical factor in the people’s survival.

I would argue, in the light of what has just been said, that there are significant opportunities for dialogue with Aboriginal culture. What one may find most interesting are the ideas of custodianship of land (not exploitation) and the integrated idea of law, which has an affinity with the Biblical idea of the promised land and Torah (not a set of restrictive legal rules, but an integrated way of life that covers science, knowledge, law and faith).

Having said that, John Paul II is also mindful of the tribulations inflicted upon Aboriginal people. He acknowledges that the white settlement of Australia brought traditions, law, money, power, and patterns of behavior that were alien to Aboriginal people and against which they found it hard to protect themselves (Alice Springs Address, n6). He noted that many Aboriginal people have been dispossessed, with some being utterly separated from their lands and ways. Moreover, work is hard to find for many Aboriginal people and racism is a constant affliction for them (Alice Springs Address, n7).
For a Catholic University in the Kimberley, Pope John Paul II also makes another vital point. He notes that “education in a different cultural background is difficult” (*Alice Springs Address*, 7). Such a statement highlights the importance of a University campus set up specifically to cater for Aboriginal people. Despite well-intentioned programs on other campuses, and despite significant resources being invested into education for Aboriginal students, levels of education for Aboriginal students continue to fall way behind those of non-Indigenous Australians. Pope John Paul II thus challenges us to develop and implement culture-appropriate education that can engage Aboriginal people from within their cultural backgrounds, rather than educate them in alien cultural contexts. To put the point another way, following Pope John Paul II’s insight, a Catholic university in the Kimberley has a choice. Is it to be an institution that exists for the education of Aboriginal people, or is it to be a campus for Aboriginal education? Russell-Mundine and Mundine (2014, 97) put the point very clearly in relation to Catholic faith. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics, “can and should be Catholic in ways that speak to their own cultures.” I would broaden that point and say that the mission of a Catholic university in the Kimberley should be to form Aboriginal students so that they learn knowledge, faith, values, and wisdom in a way that resonates with and promotes their own culture, rather than forming them in an altogether different culture.

I would like to raise one last point in this section, on the idea of mission, as in faith mission. John Paul II (*Alice Springs Address*, n5) observed that some of the Dreamtime stories “speak powerfully of the great mysteries of human life, its frailty, its need for help, its closeness to spiritual powers and the value of the human person.” Pope John Paul II himself notes the affinity of these stories for the lessons gained from the people of the Bible. So in his words, “It is wonderful to see how people, as they accept the Gospel of Jesus, find points of agreement between their own traditions and those of Jesus and his people.” This is a radical statement – and it challenges the Catholic idea of mission. Is our responsibility to teach the Gospel as it has been received by us, or first to discover how God
has been at work among this people? There is thus a key question: What, and how much, can Aboriginal people teach non-Indigenous society that has been forgotten or perhaps even not yet known by us in our religious tradition?

The Church’s approach to Aboriginal culture can be expressed best not with my words, but the words of John Paul II. They are words about the Aboriginal people of Australia and I think they capture something of the spirit and mission of a Catholic university in the Kimberley (Alice Springs Address, n2-3).

Your culture, which shows the lasting genius and dignity of your race, must not be allowed to disappear. Do not think that your gifts are worth so little that you should no longer bother to maintain them. Share them with each other and teach them to your children. Your songs, your stories, your paintings, your dances, your languages, must never be lost. Do you perhaps remember those words that Paul VI spoke to the aboriginal people during his visit to them in 1970? On that occasion he said: “We know that you have a lifestyle proper to your own ethnic genius or culture – a culture which the Church respects and which she does not in any way ask you to renounce... Society itself is enriched by the presence of different cultural and ethnic elements. For us you and the values you represent are precious. We deeply respect your dignity and reiterate our deep affection for you.”

Learning from Indigenous Traditions

In the previous section, I have written about cultural dialogue with Aboriginal people. I would now like to highlight some concrete lessons that white culture can learn from Aboriginal culture.

There has been in the past a sort of intellectual imperialism or paternalism. That attitude sadly still exists in some quarters and assumes that encounters between Western intellectual traditions and Aboriginal Intellectual Tradition
are “one-way streets” in which Aboriginal people are taught the benefits of Western technology and civilization. Fortunately, and especially on the Broome campus of the University of Notre Dame, there is a clear realisation that the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and Aboriginal traditions have, in fact, much to learn from each other.

Russell-Mundine and Mundine (2014, 100) note that in the best of the Catholic tradition, there is a mutual communication between cultures and Christian faith. While culture is vital to people achieving their full humanity, and while there are a variety of cultures, those cultures benefit from the message of Christ.

The Second Vatican Council (Ad Gentes, n11) also encouraged missionaries to not only enhance other cultures with the message of Christ, but to also engage the world’s peoples, and to learn from them through “patient dialogue,” so that they can learn, “what treasures a generous God has distributed among the nations of the earth.” While this message from Ad Gentes may be interpreted or misinterpreted, to refer to material “treasures” of other cultures, John Paul II (Redemptoris Missio, n52) makes it clear that the universal Church can learn lessons from the world’s different cultures. That is, by engaging local cultures with a sincere mutuality, the Church is, “enriched with forms of expression and values in the various sectors of Christian life, such as evangelization, worship, theology and charitable works.” That is, the Church exists not only to bring the message of Christ to all peoples, but by encounters with cultures in which the Church not only speaks, but also listens, the Church becomes able to “express better the mystery of Christ, all the while being motivated to continual renewal.”

In short, a Catholic university should exist not only to share the knowledge and values of the culture from which faculty originate, but it also has the mission to learn from local cultures and to appropriate the benefits that those local cultures can share with the worldwide community. From another perspective, this means that part of the vital role of a Catholic university in the Kimberley is to learn from the wisdom traditions of the local people, translate them into
language that “Westerners” can understand, and to use those traditions to help solve serious issues that affect their culture.

To illustrate this point, I would like to outline three examples of encounters with Aboriginal culture and wisdom in which “white” culture has either learned something new, or been reminded of something it has lost.

**Integration in Education**

To tell a personal story, in November 2009, I had the honour of meeting Professor (now Senator) Patrick Dodson to discuss collaboration between the University of Notre Dame Australia and the Yawuru community. Those who have met Senator Dodson know that he is a polymath with a deep knowledge of Western and Aboriginal history and cultures. During our meeting, Senator Dodson remarked that Western education has become compartmentalised, disintegrated, and thus lacking in wisdom. Indeed, in its prime, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition had been an integrated tradition. Lately, though, Catholic Intellectual Tradition has fallen for the modern Western ways that have privileged efficiency and technology and which has unfortunately seen a helpful division of intellectual labor degenerate into compartmentalisation and disintegration. Senator Dodson explained, though, that the Aboriginal way is to integrate knowledge, law, and tradition under a tradition of wisdom. I responded to him by noting that he and Pope John Paul II had made exactly the same observations, albeit in different words.

In *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (n16) John Paul II lamented that “the explosion of knowledge in recent decades” had unfortunately been accompanied in universities by “a rigid compartmentalization of knowledge.” John Paul II argued that the vision for a Catholic university should be to stand for an “integration of knowledge” and that a Catholic university should be dedicated to a “living union” of knowledge under the mantle of wisdom. Such a union of knowledge could enable a university to work towards “a higher synthesis of
knowledge,” in which not only would truth be taught, but students would appropriate the meaning, place and significance of truth.

Against the disintegration that has afflicted many contemporary universities, John Paul II argued that philosophy and theology could help with restoring a unified wisdom to contemporary higher education. However, listening to Senator Dodson, it seemed clear that a problem and a solution that seem to be very recent and very contemporary within the Catholic Intellectual Tradition finds a resolution in the ancient but living tradition of the Kimberley.

One would be thus hopeful that by bringing together the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and Aboriginal wisdom, a university can achieve the aim of Pope John Paul II (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n20) to engage in more interdisciplinary studies. Importantly, I am not referring to the common run of “interdisciplinary studies” that have no higher point of unity and thus combine different disciplines laterally and create a phenomenological babel. Rather, I mean studies integrated through a higher and unifying vision that, “enable[s] students to acquire an organic vision of reality and to develop a continuing desire for intellectual progress.” The gift that Aboriginal people can give, by sharing with higher education a vision for a unified wisdom tradition, is that, as a Catholic university in the Kimberly, we can pursue more than just this-and-that item of useful knowledge. Instead, we can bring our staff and students to an appreciation of wisdom, under the mantle of which, knowledge and discoveries can be unified, students can appreciate their broader implications and the ethical dimensions of their learning. This sort of wisdom learning can lead to what John Paul II (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n20) calls, “an entire educative process ... directed towards the whole development of the person.”

Thus, the Aboriginal tradition of thinking and living in integrated wisdom can help in the recovery and renewal of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. John Paul II (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n4) argued that this renewal would come from discovering not just truth, but the meaning of truth, which is found in the wisdom as communicated through a higher perspective. The above discussion
also makes it clear that integrated and integrating wisdom can be found in the
Aboriginal tradition. At a concrete level, this is a tradition in which law,
knowledge, science, healing and faith are all integrated.

This vision raises a serious question. How should we structure the
curriculum of a Catholic University in the Kimberley? Should it be “Western,”
and compartmentalised with a view to efficiency and utility, or should it be
integrated and dedicated to wisdom, as per the best parts of the Aboriginal and
Catholic Intellectual Traditions? I would argue that the distinctive role of a
Catholic university in the Kimberley is to offer a curriculum that goes beyond
utilitarian training and producing “job-ready” graduates. Instead, it has the
capacity to offer a curriculum that educates students formatively so that they
may become wiser, more reflective, more thoughtful representatives and leaders
of their respective communities. There are practical and other considerations
bearing upon this point. I shall raise them in the conclusion of this work.

Moral Foundations

Another way in which Aboriginal tradition can help the Catholic Intellectual
Tradition is in the foundations of moral theology. By that, I do not mean the
actual commands of imperatives of morality, those actions that are deemed
“right” or “wrong.” Instead, it can be argued strongly that Aboriginal tradition
can challenge and renew the very foundations of what makes for a moral person,
or a moral people.

The context of this argument is that, as John Paul II has noted (Dulles, 2004),
Catholic moral theology has become rather decadent and legalistic. His critique
of Catholic morality is that it has been over-concerned with legal prescriptions,
consequences, and practical outcomes. While these are legitimate concerns for
moral theology, he argues that they have become over-emphasised and that for
too long, Catholic moral theology has paid “too little attention to the human
person experienced from within.” That is, Catholic moral theology has been
afflicted by legalism, and by a rules-based morality which, in the words of
American theologian Stanley Hauerwas, has forgotten both God and people. In other words, Catholic morality has become obsessed with the “externals” of morality and forgotten the “interior” of morality; that is, the experience of the person as a morally healthy individual.

The remedy to that problem with Catholic moral theology can come from considering the moral wisdom of the Kimberley. In conversations about morality, the Yawuru people have been kind enough to explain Lyarn Ngarn (lee-yarn ne yarn), which is best translated into English as “setting right of the spirit.” Lyarn Ngarn means that what lies at the foundation of morality is neither reward or punishment, nor whom one hurts or benefits, nor is it a set of legislative rules as per Western law. Rather, rather morality is about a coming together of the spirit, or a setting right of the person’s spirit. What may strike a Catholic theologian about Lyarn Ngarn is that, as a way of life, it resonates closely with the renewal of morality that Pope John Paul II was striving for in the Catholic Church, especially in his encyclical on moral theology, Veritatis Splendor (1993).

So how does Catholic theology overcome legalism and a moral theology that focusses on “external acts” rather than on the “internals” or persons as “moral agents”? It seems clear then, that in the search for moral foundations, the Catholic tradition can find a dialogue partner and, I argue, a senior mentor in the Wisdom Tradition of the Kimberley people. To put the point another way, something that may be new to the Catholic tradition is something that has been second nature to the Kimberley people for thousands of years. So, to learn from Aboriginal people, to draw out their wisdom which may help Westerners is a vital role of a Catholic university. I might even be bold enough to suggest that this sort of exercise might be humbling because Westerners might discover that even though they might have been more advanced technologically, Kimberley culture is in fact superior to theirs in some ways, especially morality.
Leisure

What has just been said about morality ties in to a specific example from Western and Aboriginal cultures. As John Paul II writes (Vertitatis Splendor, n1), human acts are moral because they give moral definition to the person who performs them. That is, we create ourselves personally through our decisions. Such a viewpoint is a far cry from the morality of rules, legalism, utilitarianism or consequentialist outcome. Instead, it reflects a life philosophy that is concerned neither with what a person has, nor what the person does, but instead, with what sort of person they are becoming.

In that light, it is very interesting to consider the example of Aboriginal economy, in which new technology is not devoted to consumerism, but the liberalisation or culturing of the human person. To consider this example, we first need to outline some issues with Western approaches to work, technology and human values.

John Paul II (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n18) argues that the Catholic viewpoint is that ethical concerns should always have priority over technical realities. That is, that persons are more important than things. This means that one of the challenges facing a Catholic university, in his view (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n7), is that our world has become overwhelmed by “rapid developments in science and technology.” While these developments bring many material benefits, John Paul II cautions that they do not always work for the good of human persons, either as individuals or as a society. Thus, a Catholic university has the responsibility to find human meaning in the midst of technological change, and to respond to technological and economic developments in a way that enhances “the moral, spiritual and religious” dimensions of human existence.

Technology has had the capacity to help make our lives better, even happier. In a 1930 essay, now considered a classic, John Maynard Keynes (1930) argued that with technology, “mankind is solving its economic problem.” He predicted that these developments would allow people to fulfil their economic needs with only a fifteen-hour work week. A number of reasons have been offered to explain
the fact that most people in our society are working the same hours, or even more, instead of the utopic fifteen hours predicted by Keynes. However, one explanation seems obvious. The wants and perceived needs of today are more than the 1930s. It seems clear that with modern technology, we could easily sustain a 1930s level of comfort with Keynes’ fifteen-hour work week. But we could not sustain ourselves thus if we are addicted to a 2018 level of prosperity, including large air-conditioned homes, two cars, mobile phones, flat screen televisions, internet access and myriad medical technologies. In other words, as our productive efficiency has increased, our desire for material goods and services has risen dramatically.

At the same time, Josef Pieper (1952) argues that Western society has forgotten the value of leisure and given privilege to material gain and the accumulations of possessions. Pieper (1952, 1-2) argues that leisure, properly conceived was one of the very foundations of Western culture. As Aristotle noted in his *Metaphysics*, creative leisure gave rise to the arts and sciences that gave meaning and value to society. Indeed, as Pieper points out (1952, 2) the Greek word σχολή/skole and the Latin scola do not refer to schools as we know them today, but they refer to leisure.

Pieper’s thesis (1952, 2) is that Western society has forgotten the value of leisure and instead fallen for the social paradigm of “total labour.” Work has overwhelmed and dominated human activity to the point where human existence is oriented towards work. Utilitarian productivity is privileged and human life is commodified with respect to production. The answer to this existential crisis for Western culture is, in Pieper’s view, a reevaluation of work, and the avoidance of “total labour” and “workaholism” and a recovery of the meaning and value of leisure. His point is that leisure is not laziness, but “the preserve of freedom, of education and culture, and of that undiminished humanity which views the world as a whole” (Pieper 1952, 33).

Has Aboriginal culture got anything to say about this crisis of Western culture? Eugene Stockton’s work (1982, 1984, 1995) on Aboriginal economics
and society gives a valuable answer. In short, Stockton’s research showed that in
the Aboriginal economy, human culture is valued over the accumulation of
material goods. He argues that archaeological and other evidence confirms that
new technologies have been used by Aboriginal people not to increase material
wealth, but to enhance liberal culture.

To make his point, Stockton (1982, 31) clarifies that, “Liberal activities fit
the remainder of the waking time left over from subsistence activities, and
include leisure, religious ritual, education, display of skill or art, sport and play,
sex, inter-personal communication and anything else which makes for quality
of life.”

Stockton observes that when Aboriginal people adopted new technologies,
they did not do so in order to increase their material wealth or to allow them to
further exploit their environment. Instead, new technologies were used to
augment the time available for liberal activities. He notes that (1982, 33):

Over some 40,000 years, Aboriginal society evolved but slowly
to the delicate balance with its bush environment which
prevailed at the coming of the first British colonists. Such
technological changes as did occur were seen less as an
advantage to greater productivity (which was not needed on a
day to day basis), but as providing more time for the really self-
enriching activities.

Thus, Aboriginal society used new technologies, not for material gain, but
instead they, “invested the advantages of the new tools into the realms of the
ego, the mind and the soul” (Jones 1977:202, cited in Stockton, 1982, 33).

Stockton helpfully compares Western and Aboriginal economies. Through
the tools of archaeology and anthropology, he observes that Western society
began with a struggle within its natural environment, which was turned into an
endeavour to dominate the environment, manipulate and exploit the
environment to fulfil wants and needs. Then, when the environment was
exhausted, new environments would be sought out and similarly exploited.
Stockton observes that this way of living precipitated conflicts between societies and led to competition between individual people (1995, 18). This point is borne out by the work of Malthus in his Essay on Population (1798) and Darwin’s Origin of Species (1859) in which the natural order of human beings and nature itself is seen in terms of exploitation, shortage and lethal competition that leads to survival of the fittest. This view of economy and the “natural order,” at its worst, points led to human relationships being based on greed and dishonesty, people having their personal value defined by their work (or lack of work), utilitarian production being valued over service to the community, wastefulness of resources, environmental exploitation and competitive conflict in all areas of life (Stockton 1995, 38-9).

Instead of that path, in which material possessions and utilitarian production are almost idolised, Stockton makes the point (1984, 62; 1995, 18) that Aboriginal Australians took another cultural path. Instead of exploitation of the land, they became its custodians. Instead of a materialist-economic relationship with land as a commodity, Aboriginal people became partners with their land in a way of life that became a spirituality.

I would argue then, that Aboriginal culture has a valuable lesson to teach Western society. Instead of using new technologies to sustain a never-satisfied craving for more goods and services that probably violates the Commandment against “coveting” (Exodus 20), Aboriginal culture utilised technology in the service of leisure and the liberal activities that make persons more cultured and more civilised. This simple, but powerful, contrast between economic visions means that Aboriginal culture can offer the solution to some pressing social concerns facing Western society. That is, by prioritising the liberal realm over the material, Aboriginal people provide a valuable lesson in leisure, a lesson that has been forgotten by a technology-obsessed society and a lesson that can be re-taught and augmented by the Aboriginal people’s way of life.

If we recall that John Paul II bases Catholic Social teaching not on the value of material goods, but in the dignity of the human person (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis
n41), it would seem that Aboriginal “economics” and social morality can teach Catholics, and society in general, a valuable lesson in human dignity.

Conclusion
This chapter raises the question of whether a Catholic university with a mandate to serve Aboriginal people should have a mission to extinguish and replace, or to enhance and advance Aboriginal culture. The clear answer from Church leaders such as Pope John Paul II is that a Catholic university’s mission should not be based on paternalism or a sense of cultural superiority. Instead, the university is clearly mandated to work in solidarity with people and to dialogue with their culture. A Catholic university in the Kimberley should thus be committed to a relationship of mutuality rather than paternalism. To back up this theoretical point, we have noted several examples in which, not only can Western and Aboriginal cultures meet on mutual terms, but Aboriginal wisdom and culture has valuable lessons to teach Western culture.

Perhaps a secular University could achieve similar objectives, but a Catholic university has an added motivation and theoretical framework from which to approach Aboriginal culture. That is, as seen in our interpretation of John Paul II’s work, Aboriginal culture is not just an accident of history. Instead, Catholics view Aboriginal culture as being created by God. It is willed by God and, as John Paul II has noted, it is the means through which Aboriginal people encounter God authentically. Thus, despite the well-intentioned but misguided approaches of Catholics in the past, the Church and its universities now are charged to see God at work, not despite Aboriginal culture, but through it. If, therefore, Aboriginal culture is created by and willed by God, the Catholic university’s mission is not to replace that culture, but to learn about it, teach it and advance the culture, develop the members of that culture and to invite those from outside that culture to learn from its wisdom and values.

More will be said about the next two questions in the concluding chapter of this work, but they shall be raised now. In the first place, is it important to have
a Catholic university located physically in the Kimberley? It may be argued that it would be more economically sound to transport Aboriginal students and accommodate them at a larger urban campus. That may be so, but one can ask if doing so would result in a cultural dislocation for the students. Moreover, the question is whether a campus in the Kimberley would be an institution that exists for the education of Aboriginal people, or is it to be a campus for Aboriginal education?

The second question is whether a Catholic university in the Kimberley should be vocationally-oriented, producing job-ready graduates? Or should it be committed to a liberal arts education of students in the wisdom of their culture? That question relates to whether a university intends to help students fit in with another culture, or to help students advance their own culture. That question will be raised in our conclusion but first we need to address the question of why Catholic institutions have had trouble understanding and respecting Aboriginal culture, and other cultures around the world. So, we now turn to discussing the scourge of “classicism” that has afflicted Catholic scholarship and practice for so long.